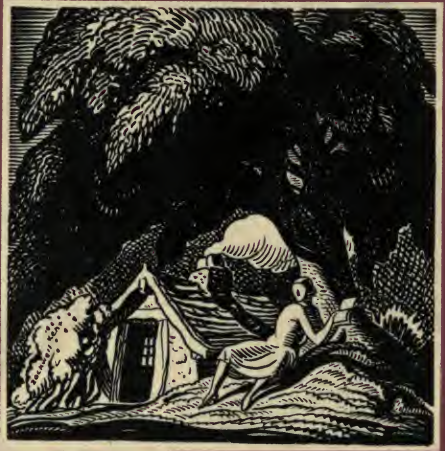

The HOVEL

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TRIVIA

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TRIVIA

PRINTED FROM THE PAPERS

OF

ANTHONY WOODHOUSE, ESQ.

BY

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

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NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

WHEN the books and papers of the late Mr. Anthony Woodhouse came into my possession, I found this little collection of essays and sketches, neatly tied up with string and labelled "Trivia." They have for their subject incidents and experiences of the year or two he spent in London, after leaving Oxford. He seems to have worked at them at different times, endeavouring, apparently, to find a prose-form in which to express moods and feelings generally supposed to belong to the province of verse. But evidently the result did not satisfy him, and he put "Trivia" away among his other papers. I have, however, thought it worth while to print a few copies of this little book—giving as it does a picture of Mr. Woodhouse's life and thoughts, it will be at least of interest to his friends.

CONTENTS.

"Thou, Trivia, goddess, aid my song:
Through spacious streets conduct thy bard
along."

(GAY's *Trivia, or New Art of Walking the Streets of London.*)

FASHION PLATES.

I WAS fond of loitering at the book-stalls, looking in at the windows of print-shops, romancing over the pictures I saw of Shepherdesses and old-fashioned Beauties. Tall and slim and crowned with plumes in one period, in another these Ladies became wide-winged and fine as butterflies; or floated, large, balloon-like visions down summer streets. And yet, in all shapes they had always (I told myself) created thrilling effects of beauty, and waked, in the breasts of modish young men, ever the same charming emotion.

But then I would question this. Was it true to say that the human Heart remained quite unchanged, beneath all the changing fashions of shirt-fronts and brocades? In this elegant though cruel sentiment, I came to believe that colour and shape made a difference. It was my hypothesis that about 1840 had been the meridian Hour or Golden Age of the passion. Those tight-waisted, whiskered, Beaux, those keep-sake Beauties, had adored each other, I felt,

with a leisure, a refinement and dismay, impossible at other dates. And as I stood gazing, my thoughts would lose themselves in the blue of Fashion-plate landscapes.

L'OISEAU BLEU.

WHAT was it, I more than once asked myself; what was I looking for in my walks about London? And it seemed to me as if there were a Bird I was following, a bright blue Bird which sang sweetly, shedding down a glamour on things, as it floated about from one place to another.

If I found myself, however, among people of middle age and settled principles, saw them moving regularly to their offices—what kept them going, I wondered. And I would feel rather ashamed of myself and my Bird.

There was, though, an old philosophic doctrine—I had studied it at College and knew that many grave people believed it—which maintained that all men, in spite of appearances and pretences, all lived alike for Pleasure. This theory certainly brought important, respected, people very near to me. Indeed, with a sense of low complicity I have watched a Bishop. Was he, too, on the hunt for Pleasure; solemnly pursuing his Bird?

IN THE ABBEY.

IT was like coming home, to get back to that Westminster street under the Abbey, where I had taken rooms. I was supposed to be studying for the Bar; but this half ecclesiastical, half-academic corner made my days seem still like Oxford days; and in the Abbey, where I sometimes went, sitting alone in a nook among curtains and monuments, it was not difficult, as I listened to the choir's voices, to dream myself back to afternoons in school or college Chapel.

I remember waking once to a sudden sense of the vastness of the Abbey and the London twilight. The thought of Life almost frightened me, the strangeness of my own existence among these dead populations. The blazoned space thrilled me with a sense of Life's splendour; the epitaphs (and I believed in all their protestations) recounted its heroic griefs and deeds; loud to my ears came chanted prayers for deliverance from Life's perils and sins; while the allegorical figures on the tombs

reminded me in marble silence of Time's Scythe, Fame's Crown and Trumpet;—and Fortune's ever-turning Wheel, which might some day exalt my thoughts to who knew what shining heights?

GREAT SAYINGS.

I HAD a fire, a lamp, shelves for my books. I was not often disturbed; I could lose myself in large speculations, or watch the game of Fortune, and heroes climbing their glittering peaks. As a boy, poring over the school Classics, although I had but half understood the ancient melancholy of the poets, yet with complete enthusiasm I had read the deeds of the men who moved across that stage; their names had been always ringing in my ears. And the sayings of these great men still filled my mind with a kind of noble pride: Pompey's boast, how with one stamp of his foot he could fill all Italy with armed soldiers; how Caesar, in a storm at sea, said to the boatman of his little pinnace, "Fear not, thou hast Caesar and his Fortune with thee"; how the young Alexander, hearing of his father's triumphs, cried to his schoolfellows, "Sirs, I shall have nothing left to conquer!" And how, at the age of twenty-two, this young King marched out to conquer the World; and passing over the

Indian mountains down to the great Ocean, he prayed on its shores to the Gods, "that no warrior might ever again go beyond the bounds of his Journey and Conquest."

THE ORGAN OF LIFE.

ALMOST always in London—in the congregated uproar of streets, or in the noise that drifts through walls and windows —you can hear the hackneyed melancholy of street music; a music which sounds like the actual voice of the human Heart, singing the lost joys, the regrets, the loveless lives of the people who blacken the pavements, or jolt along on the omnibuses.

"Speak to me kindly," the hand-organ implores; "I'm all alone!" it screams amid the throng; "thy Vows are all broken," it laments in dingy courtyards, "And light is thy Fame." And of hot summer afternoons, the cry for Courage to Remember, or Calmness to Forget, floats in with the smell of paint and asphalt—faint and sad—through open office windows.

ST. JAMES'S PARK.

I AMUSED myself, walking across St. James's Park, by peopling this polite old landscape with Charles II.'s Court, in the way Grammont describes it, "le duc de Boukingham, le duc d'Ormont, la Stuart, cette Princesse, la belle Jennings," all playing on guitars, as was then the fashion, and coming from "Wit-Hall" or from their little gilt navies on the Thames.

Passing into the Green Park, however, I passed at the same time into the following century, somehow believing that George II.'s Ministers and Lords were gossiping and intriguing, in their wigs and gold lace, under the roofs of the Arlington Street houses. And I then would glance up at a certain Piccadilly house, looking for that Eighteenth century Duke, who, after fifty years as the leader of pleasure in that age of pleasure, was to be seen, ninety years ago, sitting all day on his balcony; a little, aged man, half-deaf and half-blind, but still drinking in the sweet sights and sounds of Piccadilly.

THE VOICE OF THE WORLD.

"AND what are you doing, Woodhouse?" The question of these school contemporaries of mine, and their greeting suddenly in Bond Street (I remember how shabby I felt as I stood talking to them)—for more than a day or two the question haunted me. And behind their well-bred voices, I seemed to hear the voice of schoolmasters and tutors, of the professional classes, and all the World.

What, as a matter of plain fact, was I doing? How did I spend my days? The days which, as I knew, were numbered, and which were invariably described in emblems and sermons, as so melancholy-brief, so irrevocable.

I decided to change my life. Like other people, I would strive to win a place and name for myself in the world. I began thinking of my endeavours, my studies by the midnight lamp, my risings at dawn for stolen hours of self-improvement. I saw myself putting my shoulder to the wheel, nailing my colours to the mast.

But alas! the day, the little day, was enough just then. It somehow seemed enough to be alive in the Spring, with the young green of the trees, the smell of smoke in the sunshine: I loved the old shops and books, the uproar darkening and brightening in the shabby daylight. Just a run of agreeable faces—and I was always watching for faces—would keep me amused. And London was but a dim-lit stage, on which I could play in fancy any part I liked. I would be drawn with Chatham to St. Paul's amid the cheers of the Nation; or would mutter with Cromwell, "Take away that Bauble!" as I walked past the Houses of Parliament.

THE SPRING IN LONDON.

LONDON seemed like an underground city; as if its low sky were the roof of a cave, and its murky day a light such as one reads of in countries beneath the earth.

And yet the natural sunlight sometimes shone there; white clouds voyaged in the blue sky; the interminable multitudes of roofs were washed with silver by the Moon, or mantled with a mask of new-fallen snow. And the coming of Spring to London, was to me not unlike the descent of the maiden-goddess into Death's Kingdoms, when pink almond blossoms blew about her in the gloom; and daffodils stirred among those shadowy people, faint longings for meadows and the shepherd's life. Nor was there anything more virginal and fresh in wood or orchard, than the shimmer of young foliage, which, in May, dimmed with delicate green and gold all the smoke-blackened London trees.

THE INNER KALEIDOSCOPE.

I FOUND in my mind, in its miscellany of ideas and musings, a curious collection of little landscapes, and pictures of the seasons, shining and fading for no reason. Sometimes they were views in no way remarkable—the corner of a road, a heap of stones, an old gate. But there were a number of charming pictures too: as I read, between my eyes and book, the Moon would shed down on harvest fields her chill of silver; I would see old autumnal avenues, with the leaves falling, or swept in heaps; and storms would blow among my thoughts, with the rain beating forever on the fields. Then would appear Winter's upward glare of snow; or the pink and delicate green of Spring in the windy sunshine; or cornfields and green waters, and youths bathing in Summer's golden heats.

And as I walked about, certain places haunted me; a foreign cathedral rose above a darkening foreign town, the colour of ivory in the sunset light; now I would find myself in a French garden, full of lilacs

and bees, and shut-in sunshine, with the Mediterranean lounging and washing outside its walls; now in a little college library, with busts, and the green reflected light of Oxford lawns —and again I heard the bells, reminding me of the familiar Oxford hours.

I SEE THE WORLD.

"BUT you go nowhere, see nothing of the World," my cousins said.

Now although I did sometimes go to the dinner-parties to which I was now and then invited, as a matter of fact I found I really got more pleasure by looking in at windows, and had a curious way of my own of seeing the World. And of summer evenings, when carriages hurried through the late twilight and darkness, and the great houses took on airs of mysterious expectation, I would go out through the dusk; and, wandering into the West, would lose my way in unknown streets—an unknown City of revels. I liked to see that there were still splendid people on this flat earth. And if a door opened, and a bediamonded lady moved to her carriage, over carpets unrolled by powdered footmen, I could easily think her some great Courtezan, some half-believed Duchess, hurrying to card-tables and flambeaux, and strange scenes of joy. Then, at dances, standing in the street, and stirred by the music, the lights, the rushing sound of voices,

I would think the ladies as beautiful as stars who passed by me, from their carriages, up those lanes of light; the young men looked like Lords in novels; and if (as sometimes happened), people I knew went by me, they struck me as changed and rapt beyond my Sphere. And when, on hot nights, windows were left open, and I could look in at dinner-parties; as I peered through lace curtains and flowers at the silver, the servants moving, the women's shoulders, the divine attitude of their heads as they leaned and listened, I would imagine to myself wonderful intrigues, and quite extraordinary wines and passions.

IN THE STREET.

THESE eye-encounters in the street, little touches of love-liking; faces that asked, as they passed, "Are you my friend, my new lover?" Should I one day—in the Strand or Oxford Street perhaps—see that unknown Face I dreaded and looked for?

THE POWER OF WORDS.

I THANKED the club porter who helped me into my coat, and stepped out lightly into the vastness and freshness of the Night. And as I walked along my eyes were dazzling with the glare I had left; I still seemed to hear the sound of my speech, and the applause and laughter.

And when I looked up at the Stars, the great Stars that bore me company, streaming over the dark houses as I moved, I felt somehow that I was the Lord of Life; the mystery and disquieting meaninglessness of existence—the existence of other people, and of my own, studying Law in my Westminster lodgings—were solved for me now. As for the Earth, hurrying beneath my feet, how bright was its journey; how shining the goal towards which it went swinging—you might really say leaping—through the sky.

I must tell the Human Race of this! I heard my voice; saw my prophetic gestures, as I expounded the ultimate meaning of existence, to the white listening faces of

Humanity. Only to find the words—that troubled me; were there then no words to describe the vision—divine—intoxicating?

And then the Word struck me; the Word people would certainly use. I stopped in the street; my Soul was silenced like a bell, that snarls at a jarring touch.

More than ever I felt the ignominy of words, the gross classifications of language—the whole police-force of brutal words which burst in on our best moments, arresting our finest feelings. No one had a right to use such terms! This music within me, large, like the song of the Stars—no one could say I was Drunk! I protested.

MENTAL VICE.

THERE were hackneyed thoughts that forced themselves on me; I found my mind, especially in hot weather, infested and buzzed about by moral Platitudes. "That shows—" I said to myself, or "How true it is—" or "I really ought to have known—!" The sight of a large clock would set me off into musings on the flight of Time; a steamer on the Thames, lines of telegraph, suggested the benefits of civilization, Man's triumph over Nature, the heroism of Inventors, the courage amid ridicule, poverty, of Stephenson and Watt. Like faint, rather unpleasant smells, these thoughts seemed to lurk about the railway stations at Paddington and Victoria. I could hardly post a letter, without marvelling at the excellence and accuracy of the Postal System.

And then the pride in the English Constitution and English Freedom, which came over me when I saw, even in the distance, the Towers of Parliament—it was not much comfort that this should be sobered,

as I walked down the Embankment, by the sight of Cleopatra's Needle, and the thought that it would no doubt witness the fall of the British, as it had of other Empires, remaining to point its Moral, as old as Egypt, to musing New Zealanders on the bridges.

I sometimes was afraid of finding that there was a moral for everything; that the whole great pillared frame of the Universe had a key, like a box; had been arranged and set going by a well-meaning, but humdrum Eighteenth-century Creator. It would be little better than a Hell, surely, a world in which everything could be at once explained, shown to be obvious and useful. I was sated with lesson and allegory; weary of monitory ants, industrious bees, and preaching animals. The benefits of civilization cloyed me. I had seen enough shining of the didactic Sun.

And gazing up on hot summer nights at the London stars, I cooled my thoughts with a vision of the giddy, infinite meaningless waste of Creation, the blazing suns, the planets and frozen moons, all crashing blindly forever across the void of Space.

THE CORRECT.

I SOMETIMES suspected, I confess, that the Moral Law spoke in a strangely dubious voice to those who listened scrupulously for its dictates. I felt sure I had detected a look of misgiving in the eyes of its more earnest votaries.

But I saw no such shadow or cloud on the faces in Club windows, or in the eyes of drivers of Four-in-hands, or of fashionable young men walking down Piccadilly. For these lived by a rule which was based on no far-fetched assumptions, needed no sanction; what they did was Correct, and that was all. Correctly dressed from head to foot, they passed, exchanging correct remarks, thinking correct thoughts, without question or doubt, correctly across the roundness of the Earth.

IN THE PARK.

YES, I said one afternoon in the Park, as I looked rather contemptuously at the people of Fashion, moving slow and well dressed in the sunshine, but how about the others, the Courtiers and Beauties and Dandies of the past; they wore fine costumes, and glittered for their hour in the summer air. What has become of them? I somewhat rhetorically asked. They were all dead now. Their day was over. They were cold in their graves.

And I thought of those severe spirits who in garrets far from the Park and fashion, had scorned the fumes and tinsel of the noisy World.

But good Heavens! these severe spirits were, it occurred to me, all quite as dead as the others.

HEIMKEHR.

THE village roofs, the Church among its elms, the arms in the oak before the inn, and the formal gates of the Hall across the green—in the air and level sun it all made a dream-like picture. And the evening sounds, the voices of the rooks, the passing feet, the breezes cooling in those long-unvisited trees, mingled pleasantly in my thoughts, after my dusty journey, and after London. I could just see the roofs of the old house in its shabby little park beyond the gates; I was thinking of the people who had lived through so many quiet English years among those trees; the family whose name was to be found on many of the tombs and tablets in that little parish church, a succession of squires, with faded blazonings and epitaphs recording obscure, elm-shaded lives—"Lovers of their King and Country," "Intelligent Dispensers of Justice," they were called, and homely old virtues ascribed to them. And I remembered how, of this family, there remained a widow, with one son, and a young daughter; and

how this son and last heir, had gone—for it was he who was to restore the family fortunes—to work in London. How typical it was, how like something in a story! And then I remembered how I myself was this young man; and embarrassed with the sense of my own identity, I went across the green, and through the gates to the old house, where I had been long expected.

THE WHEAT.

THE Vicar, whom I met once or twice in my walks about the fields, told me he was glad to see that I was taking an interest in the estate and farming. Only my feeling about wheat crops, he remarked, puzzled him.

Now my feeling in regard to Wheat, although I did not explain this to the Vicar, was simply one of delight. Walking one day into a field that I had watched from a distance, yellowing beyond the trees, I found myself really dazzled by the glow and great expanse of ruddy gold. I had not remembered the glory of the Wheat; nor imagined, in my reading, that in this country so far from the Sun, there could be anything so rich, so prodigal, as this reckless opulence of gold, bursting out from the cracked earth, as from some fiery vein below. How pale and dim it made the oak trees and copses, and all the rest of the English landscape seem! I bathed myself, as it were, in the intense yellow, under the intense blue sky; the ownership of this wide-stretching field

made me feel as if Mysia, and Gargara, and the plains of Asia, were my property. I thought of the processes of corn-growing, the ploughing, the great barns, the winnowing-fans, the mills, with the splash of their wheels, or arms slow-turning in the wind, of cornfields at harvest time, with shocks and sheaves in the glow of sunset, or under the sickle moon;—what beauty it brought into the Northern landscape, the antique Biblical beauty of the South! For three thousand years corn had been the symbol of wealth, the hoarded wealth of great Cities and Empires. I decided to have all my land in Wheat.

THE GREAT WORK.

SITTING, pen in hand, alone in the stillness of the library, with flies droning behind the sunny blinds, I considered in my thoughts what should be the subject of my great Work. Should I write in reprehension of the time, crying "Fie!" on the Age, with Hamlet? Or, with Job, should I question the Universe; puzzling my sad brains about Life—the meaning of Life on this apple-shaped Planet?

SILVIA DORIA.

ORCHARD Woodhouse lies among meadows and oak forests; but beyond the blue hills, within riding distance, there is a country of parks and beeches, with views of the far-off sea. I remember in one of my rides coming on the place which was the scene of the story of Silvia Doria. Through the gates, with fine gate-posts, on which fierce and fastidious beasts were upholding coroneted shields, I could see, at the end of the avenue, the façade of the House, with its stone pilasters, and its balustrade on the steep roof.

More than one hundred years ago, in that Park, with its Italianized house, and level gardens adorned with statues and garden temples, there lived an old Lord with his two handsome sons. The old Lord had never ceased mourning for his Lady, though she had died a good many years before; there were no neighbours he visited, and few strangers came within the great Park walls. One day in Spring, however, just when the apple-trees had burst into blossom,

the gilded gates were thrown open, and a London chariot with prancing horses drove up the Avenue. And in the chariot, smiling and gay, and indeed very beautiful in her dress of yellow silk, and her great ostrich plumes, sat Silvia Doria, come on a visit to her cousin, the old Lord.

It was her father who had sent her—that he might be more free, some said, to pursue his own wicked courses; while others declared that he intended her to marry the old Lord's eldest son.

In any case, Sylvia Doria came like the Spring, like the sunlight, into the lonely place. Even the old Lord felt himself curiously happy when he heard the voice of Silvia Doria singing about the house; as for Henry and Francis, it was heaven for them just to walk by her side down the garden alleys.

And Silvia Doria, though hitherto she had been but cold towards the London gallants who had adored her, found, little by little, that her heart was not untouched.

But, in spite of her father, and her own girlish love of gold and rank, it was not for

Henry that she cared, not for the old Lord, but for Francis, the younger son. Did Francis know of this? They were secretly affianced, the old scandal reported; and the scandal, it may be, reached her father's ears.

For one day a coach with foaming horses, and the wicked face of an old man at its window, galloped up the avenue; and soon afterwards, when the coach drove away, Silvia Doria was sitting by the old man's side, sobbing bitterly.

And after Silvia Doria had gone, a long time, many of the old, melancholy, last-century years, went by without any change. And then Henry, the eldest son, was killed in hunting; and the old Lord dying a few years later, the titles and all the land and gold came to Francis, the younger son. But after his father's death, he was but seldom there; having, as it seemed, no love for the place, and living for the most part abroad and alone, for he never married.

And again, many old years went by. The trees grew taller and darker about the house; the yew hedges, unclipt now, hung

their branches over the moss-grown paths; ivy almost smothered the statues; and the plaster fell away in great patches from the discoloured garden temples.

But at last a chariot drove up to the gates; a footman in gold and orange-tawny, pulled at the crazy bell, telling the gate-keeper that his mistress wished to visit the Park. So the gates creaked open, the chariot glittered up the darkling avenue to the deserted place; and a lady stepped out, went into the garden, and walked among its moss-grown paths and statues. As the chariot drove out again, "Tell your Lord," the lady said, smiling, to the lodge-keeper, "that Silvia Doria came back."

BLIGH HOUSE.

TO the South, in riding past the walls of Bligh, I remembered an incident in the well-known siege of that house, during the Civil Wars: How, among Waller's invading Roundhead troops, there happened to be a young Oxford scholar, a poet, and lover of the Muses, fighting for the cause, as he thought, of ancient freedom; who, one day, when the siege was being more hotly urged, pressing forward and climbing a wall, suddenly found himself in a quiet old garden by the house. And here, for a time, forgetting, as it would seem, the battle, and heedless of the bullets that now and then flew past him like peevish wasps, the young officer stayed, gathering roses—old-fashioned damask roses, streaked with red and white—which, for the sake of Diana Ashburnham, the Court beauty, there besieged with her father, he carried to the house; falling, however, as he returned, struck by a chance bullet, or shot perhaps by one of his own party. A few of the young Officer's verses, written in the some-

what stilted fashion of the time, have been preserved. The lady's portrait hangs in the white drawing-room at Bligh; a delicate figure, painted by Van Dyck, with ringlets and drop-pearls, and a dress of amber-coloured silk.

TU QUOQUE FONTIUM—

JUST to sit in the Sun, to bask like an animal in its heat—this was one of my country occupations. And I often reflected what a thing after all it was, still to be alive and sitting there, above all the buried people of the world, in the kind and famous sunshine.

Beyond the orchard there was a place where the stream, hurrying out from under a bridge, made for itself a deep and quiet pool. A beech tree upheld its delicate green light over the blue water; and here, when in changed mood I had grown weary of the Sun, the great glaring, undiscriminating Sun, I could shade myself, or bathe, or read my book. And listening to this water's pretty voices, I invented for it exquisite names, calling it "silver-clean" or "Nymph-frequented"; and idly promised to place it among the learned Fountains and Pools of the world; making of it a cool thought of English greenness, for English exiles in the hot sunshine of India or Africa.

AND once in the Eighteenth century—such at least is the story—the idea and memory of this Pool, coming into the mind of a young spendthrift squire of Orchard Woodhouse, at the moment when he had just staked his inherited lands on the fall of the dice; it was the thought or presence of this Pool, where he had bathed and fished as a boy, on whose banks he had sighed as a young lover; the voice almost of beech leaves amid the glare of London lights, which saved him from ruin. For the dice falling this time in his favour, he rose giddy from the table, and never broke the resolve of that remorseful moment; but soon retiring from London, he spent the rest of his long life in rural pursuits and tranquil days, handing on the once so recklessly hazarded Estate to his son and grandson.

HAPPINESS.

CRICKETERS on village greens, hay-makers in the evening sunshine, small boats sailing before the wind—all these create in me the illusion of Happiness; as if a land of cloudless pleasure, a piece of the old Golden World, were hidden, not in far Seas, as poets have imagined, but here, close at hand, if one could find it, in some English valley. Certain grassy roads seem to lead through the forest thither; the wild pigeons talk of it behind the woods.

IN CHURCH.

"FOR the Pen," said the Vicar; and in the sententious pause that followed, I felt that I would offer any gifts of gold to avert or postpone the solemn, inevitable, hackneyed, and yet, as it seemed to me, perfectly horrible statement that "the Pen is mightier than the Sword."

COMPLEX QUESTIONS.

THE Age, the Vicar would remark, was a serious one; Englishmen were met face to face with complex questions. But the questions that had an interest for me at that time, would no doubt have seemed to the Vicar, many of them, old and imaginary. I was often occupied, I am afraid, with the complexities of my own thoughts; their odd travels and changes; their way of peopling English forests with wood-nymphs, or transforming English orchards—seen perhaps at dawn or in the late sunshine—into far Hesperian gardens. Sometimes it was merely names that filled my mind: "Magalat, Galgalat, Saraïm," I syllabled to myself; were these the names of the Magi of the East; or Atos, Satos, Paratoras? What were the names of the nymphs Actaeon saw bathing with Diana? The names of the hounds that hunted to his death that intruder; Ladon, Harpyia, Laelaps, Oresitrophos, as some call them, the shrill Hylactor; or, as they are given in other authentic books, Boreas, Omelampus, Agreus, Aretusa, Gorgo?

IN THE PULPIT.

THE Vicar had certain literary tastes; in his youth he had written an "Ode to the Moon"; and he would speak of the difficulty he found in composing his sermons, week after week.

Now I felt that if I composed and preached sermons, I should by no means confine myself to the Vicar's threadbare subjects; should preach the Wrath of God, sound the last Trump in the ears of my hell-doomed congregation; castigate and lash old, learned, out-of-the-way Iniquities. And there were fine neglected Virtues to inculcate: Apostolic Poverty, and Virginity, that precious jewel, that fair garland, so prized in Heaven, but so rare on earth. For in these matters I rather preferred extremes; liked Virtues or Vices on the old-Roman scale. And the Mediocrity, so commended in the Schools, seemed just a little insipid to my moral taste.

MY WISH.

ONLY I did genuinely love, and would fain attain to the heroic Virtue and high-shining Magnanimity, taught in the old schools; that Wisdom, not grim and harsh, but a guest at the most cheerful banquets, aiding great heroes to enjoy the gifts of Fortune, and then to laugh at her, call her a jade, a wanton, when with loud wings she fled away; that Philosophy, which, disdaining the littleness and nothingness of all sublunary things, trampled under foot Fear and Fate, and the roar of Acheron waves.

THE THOUGHT OF LONDON.

WE were talking of London, as we sat on the Vicarage lawn. The Vicar said he was always struck afresh by its immensity; the number of houses and streets and squares. All the horses and omnibuses frightened my mother, she said; I was most impressed, I told them, indeed haunted, by all the Eyes in the London streets.

LORD ARDEN.

"IF I were Lord Arden," said the Vicar, "I should shut up that great House; it's too big—what can a young unmarried man ——?"

"If I were Lord Arden," said the Vicar's wife (and Mrs. La Mountain's tone showed how much she disapproved of that young nobleman), "if I were Lord Arden, I should live there, and do my duty to my tenants and neighbours."

"If I were Lord Arden," I said; but then it flashed vividly into my mind, suppose I really were this wicked young Lord? I quite forgot to whom I was talking; my memory was occupied with the names of people who had been famous for their wicked pleasures; who had filled their palaces with revels, building pyramids, arches, obelisks, to soothe their Pride. My mind kindled at the thought of these old Audacities. "If I were Lord Arden!" I cried ——

LUTON.

IN a wheat field of that distant, half-neglected farm, I found an avenue of great trees leading to nothing. But I could see where the wheat-bearing earth had once been levelled into a terrace; and in one corner there were broken, overgrown, garden gate-posts, almost hid among great straggling trees of box.

This, then, was the place I had come to see. Here had stood the great Palladian house or palace, with its terraces, and gardens, and artificial waters; this field had once been the favourite resort of Eighteenth-century Fashion; the Duchesses and Beauties had driven hither in their gilt coaches, and the Beaux and Wits of that golden time of English society. And for a minute, although the house had vanished, and the plough had passed over the lawns, yet in the evening gold and green of that great Avenue, I almost seemed to hear and see this company of Lords and fine ladies pass, with delicate gossiping voices, among the shadows. A sense of the strangeness of Death oppressed me; how

was it that they had all gone, all those admirable people, into the cold earth; long ago ruined and perished ?

INCONSTANCY.

THE rose that one wears and throws away, the friend one forgets, the music that passes: out of the well-known transitoriness of human things, I made myself a maxim or precept, to the effect that it was foolish to look for one face; or to listen long for one voice, in a world that was after all, as I knew, full of enchanting voices.

But at the same time I could not quite forget the enthusiasm with which, as a boy, I had read the praises of Constancy and True-love, and the unchanged Polar Star.

THE SOUND OF A VOICE.

AS the thoughtful Baronet talked, as his voice went on sounding in my ears, all the light of desire, and of the sun, faded from the Earth; I saw the vast landscape of the world, dim as in an eclipse; its populations eating their bread with tears, its rich men sitting listless in their palaces, and aged Kings crying "Vanity, all is Vanity!" from their thrones.

WHAT HAPPENS.

"YES," said Sir Thomas, speaking of a fashionable novel, "it certainly does seem strange; but the novelist was right. Such things do happen."

"But my dear Sir," I burst out, in the rudest manner, "think what life really is —just think what happens! Why people suddenly swell up, turn dark purple; hang themselves on meat hooks; they are drowned in horse-ponds, run over by butcher's carts, burnt alive and cooked like mutton chops!"

MY MAP.

THE "Known World" I called the map, which I amused myself making for my sister's schoolroom. It included France, England, Italy, Greece, and the old shores of the Mediterranean; but all the rest I marked "Unknown"; sketching in to the East the doubtful realms of Ninus and Semiramis; changing back Germany into the Hyrcanian Forest; and drawing pictures of the supposed inhabitants of these unexplored regions, Dog-Apes, Satyrs, Cannibals and Misanthropes, Cimmerians involved in darkness, Amazons and Headless Men. And all around the Map I coiled the coils, and curled the curling waves, of the great sea Oceanum, with the bursting cheeks of the four Winds, blowing from the four hinges of the Universe.

THE STARRY HEAVEN.

"BUT what are they? What do they say they are?" my little sister asked me. We had gone out together to look at the Stars, which were quivering that night in splendid hosts above the lawns and trees.

As we sat there, on a garden seat, I tried to explain the old learned views about the Stars to my sister. How people first of all had thought them mere candles in the sky, to guide their own footsteps when the Sun was gone; till wise men, sitting on the Chaldean plains, and watching them with aged eyes, became impressed with the solemn view that those still and shining lights were the executioners of God's decrees, and irresistible instruments of His Wrath; and that they moved fatally among their celestial Houses to ordain and set out the fortunes and misfortunes of each race of new-born mortals. And so it was believed that every man or woman had, from the cradle, fighting for or against him or her, some great Star, Formalhant, perhaps, Aldebaran, Altaïr: while great Heroes and Princes were

more splendidly attended, and marched out to their forgotten battles with troops and armies of heavenly Constellations.

But this noble old view was not believed in now, I said; and I explained how most serious people thought that somewhere—though where they did not know—above the vault of Sky, was to be found the final home of earnest men and women; where, as a reward for their right views and conduct, they were to rejoice forever, wearing those icy jewels arranged in glorious crowns. This notion, however, had been disputed by Poets and Lovers: it was Love, according to these young astronomers, that moved the Sun and other Stars; the Constellations being heavenly palaces, where people who had adored each other, were to meet and live always together after Death. And indeed the Greeks, who were the wisest and noblest of human beings, believed that the Stars were themselves Lovers and Friends and lovely Ladies, whom the Gods had raised among the Constellations, to reward their beauty, and the fine passion of their lives on earth. And I pointed out to

her Callisto, that fairest of Arcadean nymphs, whom the King of Heaven loved; Cygnus, who mourned and sang his lost Phaeton, till a Swan at last, and still singing, he took his place among the Stars; Perseus and Andromeda, and the silver Crown of the love-lorn Ariadne. And I told how the sister Pleiads would soon rise above the trees; and then the Hyades, and Helen's brothers, and all those other Heroes and Ladies who night by night danced their dance around the sky, gazing down with kindly shining eyes on mortal lovers.

And then I spoke of the real immensity of the unfathomed Skies. But suddenly the vast meaning of my words rushed over my mind; I felt myself dwindling, falling through the blue. And yet, in these silent seconds, there thrilled through me, in the cool sweet air and night, no chill of death or nothingness; but the taste and joy of this Earth, this orchard-plot of earth, floating unknown, far away, with its Moon and meadows.

A PRECAUTION.

THE old folio gave at length philosophic consolations for all the ills and misfortunes said by the author to be inseparable from human existence—Poverty, Shipwreck, Plague, Love-Deceptions, Inundations. Against these antique disasters I armed my soul; and I thought it as well to prepare myself against another ancient misfortune, called "Cornutation," or by other less learned names. How Philosophy taught that after all it was but a pain founded on conceit, a blow that hurt not; the reply of Metrocles the Cynic philosopher, to one who reproached him, "Is it my fault or hers?" and how Nevisanus advises the sufferer to ask himself if he have not offended; Jerome declares it impossible to prevent; few or none being safe, the inhabitants of some countries, especially parts of Africa, considering it the usual and natural thing: How Caesar, Pompey, Augustus, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Marcus Aurelius, had all worn Actaeon's badge; and Philip turned it to a jest, Pertinax the Emperor

made no reckoning of it; Erasmus declared it was best winked at; there being no remedy but patience, "Dies dolorem minuit"; Time, Age must mend it; and how according to the best authorities, bars, bolts, oaken doors and towers of brass, were all in vain. "She is a woman"; as the old Pedant wrote to a fellow Philosopher. . . .

MY SPEECH.

"LADIES and Gentlemen," I began —— The Vicar was in the chair; Mrs. La Mountain and her daughters sat facing us; and in the little school-room, with its maps and large Scripture prints, its blackboard with the day's sums still visible on it, were assembled the labourers of the village, the old family coachman and his wife, the one-eyed postman, and the gardeners and boys from the Hall. Having culled from the newspapers a few phrases, I had composed a speech which I delivered with a spirit and eloquence surprising even to myself, and which was now enthusiastically received. The Vicar cried "Hear, Hear!" the Vicar's wife pounded her umbrella with such emphasis, and the villagers of Orchard Woodhouse cheered so heartily, that my heart was warmed. I began to feel the meaning of my own words; I looked at the audience, felt that they were all brothers, all wished well to the Republic; and it seemed to me an occasion to express my real ideas, my hopes for the Commonwealth.

Leaving therefore to one side, and indeed quite forgetting my safe principles, I began to re-fashion and new-model the State. Most existing institutions were soon abolished; and then, on their ruins, I proceeded to build up, in that little dim school-room, the bright walls and palaces of "the City within me"—that philosopher's City which, since Plato's days, has floated before the eyes of humanity. With enthusiasm, and, I flatter myself, with eloquence, I described it all—the Warriors; the race of golden youth bred from the State-ordered embraces of the brave and fair; the philosophic Guardians, who, being ever accustomed to the highest and most extensive views, and thence contracting an habitual greatness, possessed the truest fortitude, looking down indeed with a kind of disregard on human life and death. And then, declaring that the pattern of this City was laid up in Heaven, I sat down, amid the cheers of the uncomprehending little audience.

And afterwards, in my rides about the country, when I saw on sign-posts, or doors

of barns, among advertisements of travelling shows, or regulations for the movements of cattle, little weather-beaten, old-looking notices on which was printed "Anthony Woodhouse Esqre., B.A., of Orchard Woodhouse, will address the Meeting," I smiled, thinking of the Golden City I had built up in that little school-room, and how its walls and towers had shone with no heavenly light in the eyes of the Vicar's party.

THE MOON.

SUDDENLY one night, low above the trees, we saw the great, amorous, unabashed face of the full Moon. . . . It was an exhibition that made me blush, feel that I had no right to be there. "After all these millions of years, she ought to be ashamed of herself!" I said.

HUMAN ENDS.

I REALLY was touched, impressed, as we paced up and down the avenue, by the Vicar's words, and weighty, weighed, advice. He spoke of the various professions; mentioned contemporaries of his own who had achieved success: How one had a seat in Parliament, would be given a seat in the Cabinet when his party next came in; another was a Bishop with a seat in the House of Lords; a third was a Barrister who was soon, it was said, to be raised to the Bench.

But in spite of all my good intentions, my real wish to succeed at the Bar, or to find some other career for myself, I was nevertheless—as indeed I am still—much at the mercy of ludicrous images. Front Seats, Episcopal, Judicial, Parliamentary Benches—were all the ends, then, of serious middle-aged ambition, only things to sit on?

THE AGE.

AGAIN, as the train drew out of the station, the old gentleman pulled out of his pocket his great shining watch; and for the fifth, or as it seemed to me, the five hundredth, time, he said (we were in the carriage alone together) "To the minute, to the very minute! It's a marvellous thing, the railway; a wonderful age!"

Now I had been long annoyed by the old gentleman's smiling face, platitudes, and piles of newspapers; I had no love for the Age; and an impulse came on me to denounce it.

"Allow me to tell you," I said, "that I consider it a wretched, ignoble age. Where's the greatness of Life, where's dignity, leisure, stateliness; where's Art and Eloquence? Where are your great scholars, statesmen? Let me ask you, Sir," I cried, glaring at him, "where's your Gibbon, your Burke or Chatham?"

I RELENT.

NEVERTHELESS when, in modern books, reviews and thoughtful magazines, I read about the crying Needs of the Age, its burning Questions, its Dismays, Doubts and spiritual Agonies, my heart is touched. An impulse visits me to go out and comfort the Age, still its cries, and speak earnest words of consolation to it.

THE ABBEY AT NIGHT.

NOW once more, as at night I went past the Abbey; saw its walls towering high and solemn among the Autumn stars, I pictured to myself the white population in the vast darkness of its interior—all that hushed people of Heroes—; not dead, I would think them, but animated with a still kind of life; and at last, after all their intolerable toils, the sounding tumult of Battle, and perilous sea-paths, resting there, tranquil and satisfied and glorious, amid the epitaphs and allegorical figures of their tombs—those high-piled, trophied, shapeless Abbey tombs, that long ago they toiled for, and lay down their gallant lives to win.

MY FATE.

ON this old stage of a World, with its scrolls and arabesques and Cupids, its stage-worn scenery of opera-forest or street, what part of old Comedy, or of Passion long ago worn to tatters, is it my fate to play—to an empty house.

THE LORD MAYOR.

AN Arctic wind was blowing; it cut through me as I stood there. The boot-black was finishing his work and complaints.

"But I should be 'appy, sir, if only I could make four-and-six a day," he said.

I looked down at him; it seemed absurd, the belief of this half-frozen, miserable creature, that four-and-six a day would make him happy. Happiness! the fabled treasure of some far-away heaven I thought it that afternoon; not to be bought with gold, not of this earth!

I said something to this effect. But four-and-six a day was enough for the boot-black.

"Why," he said, "I should be as 'appy as the Lord Mayor!"

THE END.

AND Death, this great dramatic act, and high rhetorical occasion, the principal theme of the Prophets and all the old Declaimers, the supreme event for which many spent their lives in terrified preparation —never had I found much to daunt me in this great Thought; few ideas of repentance ever troubled my best meditations, or fears of the great Princes and Judges of the world below. I did not even disturb myself with the old dilemmas; whether this change were but one perpetual night of sleep without dreams; or whether there were anything yet remaining, in that invisible country, for the Dead.

No; it was Life itself, this curious, pleasant, but apparently meaningless episode of human life, not its end, that seemed to me the mystery. And sometimes, half-believing myself long since dead, and looking back, as through a dark archway, I would see the daylight, bright, as in a feverish dream, and the paths and green grass of the Earth—who was it, I would wonder,

who had loitered through that sunshine, or walked long ago about the London streets?

THE END.

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